

River Ouse & Old West: a Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers

summarised by

Mike Petty

Many of these stories were featured in my 'Looking Back' column in the Cambridge News from 1996-2014. They are supplemented by some selections 'From our Old Files' published in the Cambridge Independent Press and other notes.

The complete 'Cambridgeshire Scrapbook' of which this is a small section is published online at bit.ly/CambsCollection

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised. I hope to publish these online one day. If you would like them in the meantime then please get in touch.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library where there are many other indexes dating back to 1770.

They also have detailed newspaper cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check

There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2016

River Ouse: Looking Back

Indexing starts with papers for March 1897

1897 10 11

Before the purchase of the Ouse navigation by Mr Simpson the locks above St Ives were in a bad state of repair, through leakage of gates etc. Barges going up the river to St Ives were obliged to make a "pen" (or level water at the locks) by means of planks they carried with them for the purpose. These planks fitted into grooves in the brickwork in the sides of the locks and answered the purpose of "gates" for the lower end of the lock. Then the upper gate would be opened and the water levelled to the planks. When this was done the barge was taken out of the lock, the gates closed and the planks taken out. This, of course, was a slow process, through the leakage between the planks but still it was possible to get through. Now Mr Simpson refuses to allow the lock at St Ives to be used in the manner for which it was constructed, and has closed the locals above St Ives altogether

1898 04 04

About a thousand people assembled on the Quay, St Ives, to witness the public baptism of two young women in the river Ouse. One of the oldest and best-known chapels in the town is the Crown Yard Baptist chapel. The congregation attending there pin their faith to immersion in baptism. Unlike most chapels of the same persuasion, they have not their place of worship fitted up for this form of baptism; hence the adjournment to the river. The members of the congregation made their way to the river side, a good many of them being permitted to go inside the railings surrounding the Masonic Temple, from which a good view of the baptism was obtained. They found a large concourse of people assembled, the bridge itself was crowded with people; out of the windows protruding heads viewed the scene while on the other side of the stream a good many people had collected.

1899 02 11

Samuel Kisby Breese of the firm of coal merchants, St Ives, told the story of his career and ultimate bankruptcy. He had started when seven years old and commenced as partner to his brother 20 years ago. His father had died in 1840 and his mother carried on the business. When she died they took it over. He did not think the business was solvent then. When the navigation of the Ouse was stopped it cost them about £100 a year. They lost thirteen horses and another time three barges were sunk. They were laden with wheat and they had to pay £50 damage

1900 10 26

In considering a supply of water to Littleport the Inspector said the population would require 50,000 gallons per day. The available rivers ran for a considerable length through the fens and were used as main outfall drains for the pumping engines which pumped water from the adjoining fen lands. It was obvious that any water would be subject to pollution by peaty water from the pumping stations. The waters of the Little Ouse, if taken at the end of White Hall Drove, would prove the most suitable but would still be of doubtful quality. Whatever source was chosen there should be a service reservoir near the main road to Ely

1900 10 27

A sad suicide occurred at Lt Thetford where a platelayer employed on the G.E.R. imagined that he was a sufferer from scarlet fever, although medical examinations proved to the contrary. There were several cases in the village. Shortly before ten o'clock he left his fellow-workers near the bridge over the Old West not telling them where he was going. Time passed and a shepherd brought the intelligence that a handkerchief had been found in the wash near the river. After a diligent search his body was found in the water beneath the railway bridge

1900 11 02 c

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Littleport Parish Council considered a report on the outbreak of typhoid in the village in 1904. Their natural water supply was from the river but Ely council was now planning to discharge a large quantity of extra sewage into the Ouse. A piped water supply was said to be too expensive and nobody would give them a direct reply to their enquiries. 05 07 25b

1907 04 24

The Lord Chief Justice heard an appeal relating to fishing in the Great Ouse between Littleport High Bridge and Brandon Creek. The Lord of the Manor had granted exclusive angling rights to the Cambridge and Ely Angling Society. It was argued that ancient books showed the river had been cut after the original grant of the Manor had been made so he had no control over it. This was dismissed and the rights upheld 07 04 24 & a

1908 03 27

Ouse in flood, sheep drowned Fenstanton – 08 03 27

1909 06 11

Swavesey ratepayers were told that the present water supply had been condemned at its source and was unhealthy. The alternatives were to pump water from the river Ouse, filter it and store it in a reservoir or obtain a piped supply from the East Hunts Waterworks. The cost had been exaggerated and when the new system was working everybody would be pleased. But, if the water was impure, why had there been no illness and why did people live to such a great age in the parish? Mr Thomas Prior said he had come to the meeting to oppose it but found he could not do so 09 06 11

1909 08 13

The Directors of the Ouse Navigation Ltd have been unable to raise the necessary funds and deposits have been returned to those who subscribed for shares. They had offered £5,000 for the toll-rights and property belonging to the Navigation, which was declined. They expressed surprise at the indifference shown by people in Cambridgeshire. But few people knew about it. Looking through the Files of the C.D.N. and Cambridgeshire Weekly News we are unable to trace any reference to the enterprise. If the Directors did not take the trouble to explain their proposals to the public they can hardly blame the public for not being interested in them. CWN 09 08 13

1910 06 24

Some interesting relics were discovered while digging material for the new bridge over the River Ouse near the railway station at Ely. Twelve feet down a number of trees were found lying in a horizontal position, as if they had drifted down in time of flood. Remains of a horse and shells of fresh-water crustaceans were also found. Nearby Babylon, or 'Babblin' as local people call it, is covered with the debris of ancient potteries dating from the 15th to 18th centuries. The family of Merry have lived on this island for centuries and the present members are full of interesting information. 10 06 24d

1912 04 05

Mr G. Carmichael was appointed resident engineer by the Middle Level Commissioners in 1863 following the flooding at St Germans. He became superintendent of the South Level, then Bedford Level Corporation, Padnal and Waterden and Roswell Pits Commissioners. In 1891 he was also appointed superintendent of the Ouse Outfall Board and Caudle Fen Commissioners, in 1900 of the Middle Fen and in 1909 the Norfolk Estuary Commissioners. After retirement he was elected to the Ely Urban District Council and any advice he gave on drainage matters was treated with importance. 12 04 05d

1917 07 11

Fen drainage and the Ouse outfall – to consider report by A.H. Case but not refer to one by E.G. Crocker; urgent need of improvement, should be new body to deal with river above Denver – 17 07 11a, 17 07 18b

1918 03 06

Fen drainage and Ouse outfall – Crocker disagrees with Case report – 18 03 06a

1918 10 23

Drainage district for watershed of rivers Cam and Ouse needed – Beds and Hunts would improve their streams which would cause flooding here – 18 10 23e

1919 02 26

Serious Floods.—Not for many years has the County of Cambridge been visited by floods of such magnitude or of so serious a nature as those experienced within the last ten days. Thousands of acres are under water, and at Cambridge the water rose at one time to within six inches of the height reached by the memorable flood of 1879. At Ely the river touched a depth beyond any previously attained within the memory of the oldest inhabitants. It is good news to hear that since Sunday the water has been steadily falling. A serious break in the river bank midway between Waterbeach and Upware last Wednesday resulted in the disastrous flooding of hundreds of acres of low-lying land in the vicinity, the temporary isolation of several farms and cottages and considerable damage to stacks. On Tuesday night ... above the banks at Waterbeach Fen where the break in the river bank occurred, and farmers took prompt steps to remove their stock to safety, but on Wednesday morning a break occurred, and the breach rapidly becoming wider, the water poured through. Farm buildings and cottages were surrounded, and the inhabitants in some cases were forced to seek shelter in the village. All Wednesday farm workers and other helpers from Waterbeach and district worked up to their knees in water, but the gap widened, and it was found necessary to sink two barges in the breach. Thousands of sandbags were requisitioned and by this means the hole was filled and the inflow of water at this spot checked. Men have been employed night and day in "cradging" along the banks and strengthening the places where any water was found overflowing, this also being done on the Stretham bank of the Old West CIPof

1919 03 19

Problem of the Ouse Valley and impact of recent floods; detailed report – 19 03 19a

1919 05 14

Prevention of floods; drainage of basin of Gt Ouse; scheme proposed by Board of Agriculture; propose form single Drainage Board – 19 05 14e

1919 08 20

Improving land drainage; Board of Agriculture is about to lose the German prisoner labour used to good effect on agricultural drainage. Was lent to the Board free of cost and cannot be replaced. Work will be carried on by the local drainage authorities with rating powers. They worked in districts where there was no drainage authorities. Worked on Upper Ouse and tributaries,

on Anglesey marshes, Blackwater and other Essex rivers. More will have to be done with machinery of Canadian type. River Ouse is badly shoaled and sections between Denver Sluice and Brandon Creek extremely congested. Preliminary had labour well in hand and three dredgers will soon be working. New Ouse Drainage Board will continue work – 19 08 20c

1910 10 08a

Drainage of the fens; Board of Agriculture & River Ouse order for single drainage authority drafted – 19 10 08a

1920 10 29

Ouse Drainage Board, first meeting of new Authority, dredging of Ten Mile River

1920 11 03

Criticism of dredging in Ouse between Denver & Wissey; dredgers totally unsuitable; had sunk, drew stuff to wrong side of river – 20 11 03

1920 11 26

Ouse Drainage Board heavy expenditure; maps alone to cost £500; left bank of the Old West River at Stretham common required to be strengthened and right bank of Stretham Catchwater would be safer for being raised six or nine inches – approved

1922 06 14

The "pros and cons" of a proposed joint water scheme were reviewed at a public inquiry convened by the Ministry of Health held at Ely. Mr H.J. Martin explained that for the most part the inhabitants of Littleport drank water from the River Ouse. Mr A.K. Campbell put in an analyst's report to the effect that water from the Ouse taken four miles south of Littleport was polluted with sewage and was unfit for drinking purposes. Mr T. Peake: "I would like to remind you that Ely City empties its sewage into the waters which Littleport has to drink; also that last year the rivers were absolutely unfit for drinking purposes - they were stagnant and putrid". A feature of the enquiry was the stout opposition put up by the parishes of Haddenham, Wilburton, Stretham and Little Downham. A solitary supporter from Stretham explained that he did not attend a public meeting there - which was unanimous against the scheme - because had he done so he would probably have been "crucified"

1922 08 04

The reports of the Isle of Ely Highways and Bridges Committee revealed that as owners of the Mepal Bridge the Ouse Drainage Board had advised that it was not sufficient to bear the modern traffic. The Board were advised that the bridge was originally built for tenants and servants of the Bedford Level Corporation, and that they were under no obligation to build a new bridge suitable for modern traffic. The Board desired to know whether the County Council would be prepared to discuss terms for the erection of a new bridge, and for the future maintenance of such bridge

1922 09 02

At a meeting of the Ouse Drainage Board the Clerk reported the receipt of an announcement from the Ministry of Agriculture sanctioning the continuance of drainage schemes for the relief of unemployment during the coming winter. Mr Tebbutt said that he was extremely sorry to hear it. They thought those schemes were temporary expedients, but now they resulted in the creation of unemployment. Mr Knapp hoped the Board would hesitate very much before going into schemes or endorsing them. They were creating a class of professional unemployed, and the more money they spent the more unemployed they would have. It was a radically wrong thing to do.

1923 09 13

Ely's water tower has gone dry and the whole of the interior is under renovation, drained of every drop of its 330,000 gallons of water, which is a day and a half's supply for Ely City. Water is drawn from the river Ouse into a filter bed, where it is pumped by a steam engine through 1,400 yards of pipes into the tank. The number of bricks in the tower is estimated to be 618,000 the first of which was made by the Dean of Ely in 1854. The wisdom of the Dean showed itself in laying the first brick, and not the last, which is 140 feet above the level of the Ouse

1923 10 06

Representatives of the various drainage districts through which runs the Old West River assembled at County Hall, Cambridge, to consider a scheme for cleansing the river and repairing the banks. The work was one of the unemployment schemes proposed by the Ouse Drainage Board. Mr A.E. Wright said the river had been in a deplorable condition since 1917. Captain Matthews said that in April 1922 the river was surveyed and was very much stilted up, and the banks were 18 inches below the maximum flood level, so that it was a very serious matter.

1924 02 01

Frederick Hiam told the Ouse drainage board that a number of banks were in bad order. In Burnt Fen there were several places in the banks leaking badly. In the old days two gangs of lighters were at work, but since the board had taken the matter over nothing had been done. Who was responsible if there was a break? If we had another inch of rain we should have had the fens flooded. If there was 20 feet in of water in the river there was not a bank safe. They would soon be a million pounds in debt, if they had to pay compensation for damage done.

1924 10 28

Haddenham was full of excitement when a crowd of about 250 residents turned out and resented the appearance of an auctioneer who had come to conduct a sale under duress for Ouse Drainage Board rates. The auctioneer made preparations to commence the sale. Then things began to get lively, and ancient eggs made their appearance and amid roars of laughter the auctioneer stood like a hero spattered with yolks of many hues. They came from all directions and showered all over him. Through all the auctioneer tried to carry on. There was a plentiful supply of "ammunition and many of the eggs made their mark on people who did not expect them

1925 01 16

The Ouse Drainage Board was not popular with a small band of farmers gathered for the sale of goods distrained for non-payment of rates in the Bedford area. Two sets of harness were offered and somebody pointed to a rent in the halter. The crowd, desiring opportunities of closer inspection, surged forward and the auctioneer was pushed off his chair. Somebody bid a shilling but the auctioneer would not take it and the man holding the harness became involved in an argument with another. The lot was withdrawn

1925 01 20

The third and final distress sale ordered by the Ouse Drainage Board took place. 25 lots including crops, gold watches, bean drill, milk cooler and other articles were offered for sale but they were all withdrawn, as the bids did not go beyond one shilling. The first lot to be offered was a sporting gun. After the crowd had sung "Rule Britannia" a shilling was bid. The lot was withdrawn. The next lot met a similar fate. The crowd then gave a pathetic and heart-stirring rendition of "Shall we gather at the river". After this the proceedings were enlivened by a series of solos played by the happy possessor of a tin trumpet. A silver biscuit barrel was next. Instead of bidding the crowd sang (?) "To be a farmer's boy" and "John Brown's body" followed by "Tipperary". When the auctioneer called for "three cheers" for the Ouse Drainage Board the response was "three boos"

1925 05 15

The Ouse drainage question is still a burning topic in Soham. Two bailiffs visited a farm at Soham fen to demand rates amounting to £29. Apparently the money was not forthcoming for one of the bailiffs went over to a barn and taking down a halter which was hanging just over the top of a mangold cutter said, "I seize this". A tall, well-built young lady of 16 also seized hold of the halter, and a struggle ensued during which she struck her arm against the mangold cutter, bruising it. Another young lady then came on the scene and struck the bailiff on the nose, causing blood to flow. Farmers think the Ouse Drainage Board was forced on them by the Government and that Soham is being asked to pay for works which benefit other towns who were not asked to contribute.

1925 07 25

Another great improvement has been carried out over the Old West River at Stretham Ferry. This is a great boon to motorists for the structure takes the place of one of those old, narrow, hump-backed, awkward bridges which are veritable death-traps in these days of rapid road travel. The new bridge is at an easier angle, provides room for two vehicles to pass each other and affords a fair amount of visibility of approaching traffic. It should tend greatly to diminish the danger of a spot which has long been a bug bear to travellers on the Ely road.

1925 12 05

Lively scenes took place at an intended auction sale of goods distrained on the instructions of the Ouse Drainage Board for non-payment of the rate. Some 30 men attended the sale at Scales' Hotel, Milton Road, Cambridge. As soon as the auctioneer opened the sale there was loud cheering, followed by a continued hubbub. Accordions were played more or less melodiously, the shriek of penny whistles rent the air, and mouth organs and toy trumpets added to the general pandemonium. A Welsh pony was trotted out from the stable, its back covered with a large Union Jack and was run to and fro to the sounds of much music amid a constant flow of racing terms. It was also sternly admonished to 'keep its tail up' and was confidently dubbed next year's Derby winner. No bids were forthcoming.

1926 01 16

There were lively scenes in East Road, Cambridge, when another "sale" of goods distrained by the Ouse Drainage Board for the non-payment of rates was to have taken place. A "jazz band" quickly attracted a crowd to the scene and the sight of 30 men attired in top hats, paper hats etc, caused considerable amusement. Some had toy trumpets, some hunting horns, some penny whistles while a few motor hooters added to the "harmony". Attempts to conduct the sale were drowned in a general uproar and all the lots were withdrawn.

1926 06 30

Lively scenes were witnessed when Cambridge was "invaded" by visitors from Soham who came to protest against the sale of goods distrained by the Ouse Drainage Board from Barcham Farm for the non-payment of rates. No one could mistake their "leader", Mr A.E. Elsdon, who was attired in "cap and gown" and wore a large buttonhole of sweet Williams, supplemented by a rhubarb leaf. Another wore a slightly battered "topper" and enthusiastic

supporters had rattles, concertinas and “screechers”. A blind man in charge of a street organ had been hired and did his work thoroughly.

1926 07 30

The Ouse Drainage Board is to apply for a grant of £70,000 in aid of works in the South Level district. Sir Frederick Hiam said that the money was only available for four years & if they neglected to take advantage of it their rivers would not get done. The greatest opposition was because the Littleport and Downham district would not pay as much as the other areas. He was a landowner in that district and would make up any difference rather than see the scheme fall to the ground.

1927 01 01

The Great Ouse River Board heard that a number of stages had been erected on the banks of the Ten Mile River and the Wissey for loading sugar beet. The banks in many cases had been cut. Furthermore in loading the beet on to barges a quantity of earth was allowed to fall into the river. It should be made clear this should not be done without the approval of the Board. Sir Fred Hiam proposed notices be printed so the factories could send one to each farmer who contracted with them to supply beet.

1927 05 20

Prompt action by a young Ely man averted what might have proved serious damage at an Ely railway bridge. The fire occurred at the Cresswells Bridge over the River Ouse. The bridge, which is an iron structure, has a large amount of wooden sleepers, well pickled, and it was here the fire originated with flames rising seven feet into the air. Realising that a train was due to pass over he attacked it with pails of water from a tank close by. His first idea was that it was caused by a passing steamer or barge on the river but it is now thought it was started by a spark or hot cinders falling from a passing engine.

1927 07 14

The history of the Ouse Drainage Board since it was formed in 1920 could not be said to have been a success. There was a revolt on the part of the uplanders who declined to pay the drainage rate and it was impossible to recover the funds necessary. The Board had an overdraft from the bank of £65,000. Twelve county councils and four boroughs opposed the plans. A gathering of the “warring hoards” at Cambridge was unanimous on one thing, and that was that the Government should step in. It was obvious that some measures must be taken Jul 18

1927 11 12

The Ouse Drainage Bill was rejected by a Joint Committee of Parliament. It was proposed to construct training walls, embankments, sluices and deepening channels and rate – differentially as between uplands and lowlands – the whole of the watershed from Oxford to the Wash. It was the adequacy of even this elaborate scheme and the apportionment of the cost which provoked strong opposition. Experts reported that if the proposals were not carried out “the danger of the district returning to its original condition of swamp is very real”.

1927 11 25

The awkward position of the members of the Ouse Drainage Board on account of the rejection of the Drainage Bill led to lengthy discussions. The uplander, the fenlander and the lowlander were opposed to that Bill, the forces against it must have been tremendous and the rejection was a surprise to the Government officials who drafted it. They hoped that the new Bill that came forward would be from the fen people themselves, the trouble with the last one was that it came too much from above Nov 22

1927 12 05

A fire which might have spread with serious consequences broke out at the Ely Beet Factory. The canteen, which is a wooden building used for sleeping quarters, was discovered to be on fire at 12.57 am and within 20 minutes a considerable portion was burned to the ground. Immediately on discovery of the outbreak a telephone message was sent to the police and they gave the alarm to the Ely, Cambridge and Littleport Brigades. Within 11 minutes Ely brigade was out of the station and arriving at the scene found the place burning very fiercely. They played on it with water from the Ouse, which flows by the factory. Fortunately the flames did not spread to the sugar store, which stands close by. All the occupants of the sleeping quarters managed to escape uninjured with the exception of the nephew of the canteen manager who sustained bad burning injuries to the face.

1928 01 05

A break 35 yards long in the bank of the Little Ouse River, two miles below Wilton Bridge near Lakenheath, occurred shortly after midnight. The Ouse Drainage Board engineers are on the spot with boats laden with gault and a gang of men are working hard to stop the leak. The floods are still rising in the Fen district. The situation is serious but no further breaks are reported. The banks are being carefully watched and weak spots have been strengthened and it is hoped they will hold out.

1928 01 05

The Old West River at Strettham Bridge was brimming over by mid-day. Several of the cottages near the bridge had been invaded by the water which was lapping each side of the road & trickling over the top of the banks in one or two places. The water on the west side of the road was above the level of the roadway and was only held back by the low bank at the side of the road, through which it was forcing its way in thin trickles. A gang of men was busy stopping the leaks with gault but in one or two places a few inches of water lay partly across the road.

1928 01 23

Ald L. Tebbutt objected to proposals for a bridge over the Old West River at Twentypence Ferry. Cottenham would be linked to two villages in the Isle of Ely – Wilburton and Haddenham, but he did not see that even Cottenham had very great interest in the matter. It was a very awkward road from Cottenham to Cambridge through Histon. There were so many corners at Histon – it was one of the worst places in the country. If they spent the money in putting Histon straight it would be of much greater benefit.

1928 01 27

The Ouse Drainage Board discussed the breach of the bank of the River Wissey. It was said the cause was the action of the sluice-keeper at Denver in not opening the new eye during the floods. But the reason it had not worked was that the frost was so severe; the sluice was pulled up and great difficulty was experienced in getting it down as the grooves were covered with ice. When the thaw set in the door was eased and had worked splendidly every since. The floods were caused by the large flow of water down the Cam and the other three rivers into the Ten Mile. It was the highest flood ever recorded at Denver Sluice, three inches higher than in February 1919

1928 03 22

A farmer at Pond Farm, Witchford, said that bad seasons, a fall in prices and land difficult to deal with in unfavourable seasons were among the cause of his failure. Other causes were the high cost of labour, and the Ouse Drainage Board. He took over the farm in 1915 and his father later bequeathed him some land, which was hired as smallholdings, but the tenants, surrendered it because they could not carry on. But he had an idea he could make it pay. He cleared the land with engine cultivation and ploughing but the drought set in and he got

scarcely anything. Then a wet season 'did him down' and he surrendered the farm to the landlords because he was unable to pay the rent.

1928 04 05

The official testing of the new bridge over the River Cam at Dimmock's Cote took place. It is 216 feet long and 25 feet wide, constructed of ferrous-concrete throughout and is designed to carry the Ministry of Transport standard loading. This bridge, together with the bridge over the Old West River, completes the road which was constructed in the early years of the war for military purposes and provides direct communication between the Midlands the East Coast, opening up a large area of agricultural land between Stretham and Wicken. It will be open for traffic on April 16th.

1928 04 27

The Ouse Drainage Board heard that great damage was done to the banks of the rivers during the January floods and some £15,000 will be necessary to put them in the state they were previously. The Ministry should be induced to make some contribution to the cost. The flood, which was accompanied by a strong gale, damaged 47 miles of the banks of the main rivers and 16 miles of the smaller rivers and lodes. Mr Tebbutt said that during his knowledge of the river for 50 years only on three occasions did he remember as much flooding as on the last occasion. It was exceptional.

1928 07 18

An important scheme for the making of a new road from Cottenham to Wilburton and the erection of a bridge over the Old West River near Twentypence Ferry will come before the County Council at their next meeting. They considered a petition from inhabitants in Horningsea and Waterbeach that the council should take over Clayhithe Bridge and abolish the tolls but are unable to recommend the purchase of the bridge at present. It was only 11 ft 6 inches wide and could not be widened without being rebuilt; it would only carry a vehicle of an axle load of eight tons and the approach roads were difficult.

1928 10 03

The chairman of the Ouse Drainage Board came in for some heckling at a meeting at Cottenham. After the disaster in Southery Fen in 1915 and 1916 the work of the Board had saved the entire South Level from being flooded last winter. But Mr Wright-Graves said the value of the land had been brought down from £25 to £10 an acre. The tax was more than the occupiers could bear and it would be better to have a flood once in seven years.

1928 12 21

The Ouse Drainage Board heard the mud and refuse from Ely Sugar Beet Factory was clogging up the river so that even tugs could not get through even with no boats in tow, except on a channel ploughed day after day. The water was being held up towards Cambridge and there was serious danger of flooding. It was a waste of money to have dredgers in the Ten Mile River getting the mud out when it was being put in faster by the Beet Factory. Thousands of tons of mud were going into the river and it was a scandalous affair. The whole of the river between Ely and Denver Sluice had a thin coating of slime all over it and was the consistency of a mud-pie. It will not be the Ouse Drainage Board much longer if this goes on: it will be the Ouse Drowning Board.

1929 03 26

An inquiry was held into proposals by the Ouse Drainage Board to carry out work at Welmore Lake Sluice. The Ministry had agreed to fund one half of the cost of £30,000 but local ratepayers objected saying it was unfair to expect them to pay so large a sum when the work would benefit many others. The sluice had been constructed about 1825 and benefited the Middle Level as it prevented the tide coming up against their barrier banks. Methwold and Feltwell Drainage Board protested against payment for a sluice which would confer not one

penny benefit on them. They were being asked to 'hold the baby' and it was rather too lusty an infant for them to hold. If the cost were spread more fairly it would only amount to an 8d rate and no one would feel the pinch.

1929 09 02

At a meeting of the Ouse Drainage Board the Clerk reported the receipt of an announcement from the Ministry of Agriculture sanctioning the continuance of drainage schemes for the relief of unemployment during the coming winter. Mr Tebbutt said that he was extremely sorry to hear it. They thought those schemes were temporary expedients, but now they resulted in the creation of unemployment. Mr Knapp hoped the Board would hesitate very much before going into schemes or endorsing them. They were creating a class of professional unemployed, and the more money they spent the more unemployed they would have. It was a radically wrong thing to do.

1929 09 26

Ouse Drainage Board tax battle at Swaffham Bulbeck CDN 26.9.1929

1929 09 29

Engineers gather – Ouse Drainage Board organisation & Isle Highways – CDN 30.9.1929

1930 01 14

Sir – at Wisbech the canal is being bridged over making it impassable to canal barges and steps have been taken to fill it in at certain places. For years this navigation has been a positive disgrace. All new bridges should be designed with ample width and head room. It is vital that all waterways linking the eastern grain-growing area and the great brick-making district at Peterborough with the Midland canal system should be protected. Without them no revival of arable farming can be looked for. If the Nene and Ouse navigations were remodelled and a 14-mile canal cut from Bedford to Fenny Stratford a vast acreage of farm land would be linked to the Midlands. We have 1,100,000 able-bodied employable men working for work instead of the dole – G.C. Henderson.

1930 07 08

Adelaide Bridge weighing 135 tons was lifted bodily to a different position across the River Ouse. During the past few years it has had to carry heavy traffic during the Sugar Beet season and its foundations were getting into a dangerous state. Large piles were driven into the river and four large hydraulic jacks raised the old bridge and moved it to out of the way. The new bridge will be constructed of reinforced concrete and will occupy the same position 30 07 08

1930 09 03

Huntingdon & Godmanchester Councils are to purchase Houghton, Hemingford & Godmanchester Locks together with Houghton Mill whilst St Ives have acquired the Staunch. They again have control of the locks and the chance of putting them into a proper state of repair. The town depended entirely on the river for its sanitation and it was essential to keep a good head of water in the river. The vendor, Mr Leonard Simpson says he regrets that his personal connection with the river that he loves will be severed. 30 09 03a & b

1931 03 06

The Ouse and Cam Fishery Board want permits issued to people who catch eels as a livelihood, or to destroy them. John Barnes of Manea said men had fished for eels for centuries, it was part of their rights. He used the same implements as his great-grandfather before him; they were worth £50 and of no use for other purposes. Some years he caught £10 worth of eels, other years £80. The best time was when the flood water had almost receded that that was during the close season. He had a strong objection to getting a permit for something he'd done for years. It was the thin end of the wedge. 31 03 06b

1931 03 06

Four Gate pit, Hemingford Grey to be improved by installing sluice gates 31 03 06e

1931 03 20

Three steam lorries, two with trailers, representing a weight of sixty tons were used to test the strength of the new bridge over the Old West River at Twentypence Ferry. There was a crowd of over a hundred interested spectators. Several motor coach companies are applying to run services over the new road between Cottenham and Wilburton, shortly to be opened to traffic, which will prove another link between the north and south of the county. 31 03 20d

1931 03 27

Houghton mill was in a dilapidated state and might be dangerous to the public who passed through. Repairs were needed to the roof and there was the danger of fire. But it was one of the most picturesque in the county; there was a sentimental value attaching to it and if a subscription was raised they may be able to sell it for £100 to someone who would keep it under repair, the Ouse Drainage Board was told. 31 03 27e

1931 05 01

Straightening Great Ouse opposite Pike & Eel – photo – 31 05 01d

1931 05 29

Severe flooding in the Earith district meant that the Seven Holes sluice gates had to be opened and 5,000 acres of grass land spoiled. It was a serious matter to those who occupied the Washes that their grass should be ruined by water from the uplands – who paid nothing. The engineer could have opened the Hermitage Sluice instead since water in the Old West River was very low 31 05 29 e f

1931 11 13

Capt. George Mathews, the engineer of the Ouse Catchment Board has died. He took the post in 1920 and supervised the scheme which placed the South Levels in a safe condition, the improvement of Denver Sluice and the complete rebuilding of the Welmore Lake Sluice. 31 11 13k

1931 12 18

The Ouse and Cam Fishery Board had failed to net the carp in ponds at Hauxton and Fenstanton as they had ‘mudded’ for the winter, but the drawing of lakes at Madingley and Longstowe Hall had yielded 15,000 fish, mostly roach and rudd. Several thousand gudgeon were also taken from Hinxtion Mill and placed in the Granta at Cambridge. 31 12 18b

1932 05 27

The skin of a musk rat was exhibited at a meeting of the Ouse Catchment Board. The animals had been introduced into the country for breeding purposes but were a serious menace to river banks. They lived in colonies and made runs up to 1,000 feet long below water level. A reward of five shillings would be paid for each one killed. 32 05 27b

1932 08 26

Sir - Swavesey RDC repaired the bridge at Webb's Hole some years ago but have for a long time been lax in looking after it. How many of the old rights of way between Swavesey and the Ouse are now available for the public. Where are the stiles? How much is left of the footbridge over Covill's drain on the right of way to Holywell Ferry and is it possible to get to Overcote across Middle Fen, as in days gone by? – Fisherman 32 08 26j

1932 09 23

Huntingdon county council should take over the Tick Fen Road. At present it was a private road and if it required repairing the expense fell on the owners. On the question of drainage, Alderman Tebbutt said the Ouse Catchment Board had not got a single man with any real experience of fen rivers. They were very able young chaps but there was only one man who really understood the position, Capt Matthews, and he was now dead. 32 09 23d

1932 12 30

Sir - The Ouse and Cam Fishery Board has accepted compensation of £200 for the inconvenience and damage caused by the pollution to the River Lark. It was becoming the best roach and pike fishing waters in the Isle of Ely, now all of those thousands of fish have gone west. But what of the clubs who hire these waters: they have only had four month's fishing and it will be useless for the rest of the season. Will they be given a rebate? - W. Hitch, Ely 32 12 30c

1933 05 18

Ouse Catchment and control of the pumps - 33 05 18c

1933 05 26

The Great Ouse Catchment Board's proposal to control the pumping of water into the main river was strongly opposed by Internal Drainage Boards. Improved drainage means that the black top soil was continually shrinking: they must be able to pump whenever needed and not be ordered to stop by people in Cambridge. Instead the Board should ensure their banks were properly kept up. But they were over-ruled. 33 05 26b & c

1933 09 22

An inquiry into the new Ouse Catchment Board byelaws heard objections from Railway Companies. Their bridges might be damaged by storm or flood and signal wires blown down but they would be unable to repair them without permission: was their traffic to be held up while they got consent. Huntingdonshire County Council felt they would prejudice the growers of bat willows 33 09 22

1933 09 21

Sir Frederick Hiam was concerned that if the pumps were stopped his land would be flooded. Some simply floated at such times: when a horse went on the land it went up to its neck and had to be dragged out with ropes. In 1912 the banks held but in 1928, after the Ouse Catchment Board took over, there was a break. His men were out all night to prevent the whole district being flooded. The Board can give an order, but they haven't the men to do it. The man on the spot knows what to do, people in Cambridge did not. 33 09 21, 22, 23

1933 11 02

Briscoe Snelson lectures on Ouse with camera - 33 11 02

1934 01 26

Great Ouse training bank scheme, Wash - 34 01 26

1934 04 19

Cambridge Photographic Club featured an excellent display of cinematograph films. They included a splendid pictorial film of Cambridge by Eric Twinn on 9.5 mm stock. It was a brief presentation demonstrating his ability to choose a pleasant viewpoint. Mr J.V. Spalding depicted some of the useful work of the Ouse Drainage Board with several very clever angles chosen to obtain dramatic effect 34 04 19

1934 09 11

The new sluice and pumping station in the Middle Level at St Germans is a really wonderful piece of engineering, probably the biggest of its kind in the whole country. The drainage of

the fens has resulted in a general settlement of the land which is now below the waters in the Ouse. Now there is a reinforced concrete sluice and three Gwynnes pumps driven by Crossley Premier Diesel engines to overcome the problem. 34 09 11

1934 12 20

Traffic Commissioners considered bus services between Ely and Littleport, Little Ouse and Shippea Hill. The LNER said that railway traffic to Littleport had showed a marked decrease with 4,000 passengers being lost to road competition in the last few years. But Mr Bert Washington said his bus services were practically identical with those he operated in 1930, though there were some unauthorised journeys not at the agreed times. 34 12 20b

1935 03 15

Ely Beet Sugar Factory was charged with pollution of the River Ouse causing the death of thousands of fish in the river below Adelaide Bridge. The Company said pollution had occurred when the factory was not working and may have come from the sewage works. They employed 700 men during each campaign, were a tremendous benefit to farmers and an injunction would mean they had to stop working. The man who owned the fishing rights said there was bad feeling: he had been in shops in Ely where people refused to serve him and a wheel had come off his motor car after he'd left it near the factory 35 03 15

1935 03 15

Great Ouse Catchment Board has constructed a large-scale model of the River Ouse depicting the area from Earith to the Wash and ten miles out to sea. There is no other tidal model like it in the world. It stretches for seventy feet in a shed off Coldham's Road, shows the various sluices and has a huge plunger which mimics the raising and lowering of the tide. This will enable engineers to study the effects of plans to improve the outfall and drainage of the fens which has been made necessary because of the ever-continuing shrinkage of the land. 35 03 15b

1935 03 21

Briscoe Snelson gave a lecture of exceptional interest on the Ouse and its tributaries, showing several beautiful slides of the scenery. This was a stretch near the Godmanchester-St Neots road where the river ran alongside the rail-road and every morning an enthusiast would wait to race the 'Flying Scotsman' with his motor boat. "Elsworth was a photographer's paradise. It has no traffic problems, is on the bus route and has no petrol pump. It is a typical Cambridgeshire village, and I hope it will not change", he said. 35 03 21a & b

1935 02 22

The Great Ouse River Board has reconstructed the century-old locks and sluice at Over so that one of their big steam dredgers can pass through. It is now dredging a channel with a minimum depth of 3ft 6ins through to St Ives. All the locks are now in order as far as Godmanchester but it will be some time before a deep channel can be dredged all that way. A great deal of spoil has to be removed from the river. 35 02 22a

1935 02 28

The work of the Estuary Company had been of great assistance to the drainage of the fens. Had the tidal cut not been made between King's Lynn and the sea it was probable that Lynn would have been like Eye, an internal city, and the river would have disappeared. A model had been made of the stretch of Ouse between Denver and Lynn with a plunger mechanism to replicate the action of the tides. It was the largest of its kind in the world and would enable engineers to study data. 35 02 28 & a

1935 04 05

Ely Sugar Beet Factory was cleared by the High Court after large number of fish had died. River conditions were analogous to those of a septic tank. The bed of the Ouse had not been

dredged for thirty years and was filled with impurity which was disturbed by the considerable barge traffic. Ely sewage outfall was of an exceedingly objectionable and dangerous character and there were drains connected with the Gas Works from which noxious matter found its way into the river. But the only discharge from the factory was condenser water 35 04 05

1935 10 02

As a result of neglect of the river trees had fallen into the Great Ouse and the accumulation of silt had formed islands. In some places it had been difficult to find a river at all and some 500 miles had been cleared out. The River Board was endeavouring to keep a channel clear but weeds were a problem. The whole of the South Level is settling due to improved drainage by modern pumping machinery but the high river banks are also settling, faster than the fens themselves. At Denver the inrush of water brought in silt from the Wash meaning the bed of the river was rising, the Catchment Board's engineer reported. 35 10 02

1935 10 14

A hard road through the fen from Isleham to Prickwillow had become urgent owing to the Lark river bank being covered with gault by the Ouse Catchment Board, preventing its use by traffic. It had been used by people on foot or on horse and in 1788 tolls were charged at the Prickwillow end which had continued until recent years. A hamlet grew up with three public houses before 1835 and a school built in 1879. But it was a private road that could not be taken over by the County Council until it had been put in repair by the owners of the land. 35 10 14 & a

1935 12 07

Briscoe Snelson gave a talk, illustrated by lantern slides on 'The River Ouse with the Camera' 35 12 07

1936 02 04

Widespread flooding occurred at Huntingdon and St Ives which one motorist says looks like an island. The water in the Old West is within eight inches of the top of the bank and these are being heightened with clay on the low places. There is also heavy seepage on the Wissey, all along the Middle Fen banks, at Southery Ferry and the River Lark. All banks are being patrolled by day and night with tugs and barges in readiness to deal with any emergency. 36 02 04b

1936 03 38d

Great Ouse training walls into the Wash – 36 03 28d

1936 04 23

The bridges over the Bedford Rivers at Sutton Gault were unable to carry the weight of traffic now using them and were beyond the capacity of the Ouse Catchment Board to repair. They should be replaced by the County Council like the Honeysome Bridge near Chatteris station. But this would cost £8,000 and in times of flood the road between the two bridges would be underwater. To make a good job there would have to be a viaduct and the area did not warrant that expenditure, an Inspector was told. 36 04 22c & d photo 36 04 23a

1936 06 12F

St Ives council discussed the possible development of the Ingle Holt, a small island in the main river which had been a gift to the town. With a river frontage and a greensward it could be a beauty spot equal to any in England. The Ouse Catchment Board dredger could deposit soil to raise the level. A suspension bridge from the Waits, a lawn and trees would not be excessive cost, but anything like a recreation ground with a bandstand and beautiful flower beds should be regarded with very great suspicion. 36 06 12

1936 11 05

The Isle of Ely County Council approved the erection of a new bridge to carry the Peterborough-Wisbech road over the river Nene at Guyhirn. This was part of a vast scheme which will link up with the Leicester-Great Yarmouth road. At Prickwillow the Ouse Catchment Board had agreed that the new bridge need be only an inch higher than the existing one, instead of 1ft 3ins as originally contemplated. Plans were also submitted for the reconstruction of the bridge on Puntney Hill drove, part of one of the alternative routes for the proposed Isleham-Prickwillow road. 36 11 05b

1937 03 16

A great battle is going on over a 50 mile front to save the fens from serious flooding. But in the minds of the hundreds of men working on strengthening the sodden banks is the ever present question 'Will the banks hold?' Despite their efforts the Old West River at Aldreth Causeway overflowed and nine inches of water poured into Haddenham Fen causing people to leave their houses. Great anxiety was also caused when water came over the banks at Willingham and at Lt Thetford where a split occurred in a bank 37 03 16 & a photos – Prickwillow, Earith, Stretham, Ship Inn – 37 03 16c
Soham Lode breach – photo – 37 03 18b
Workers at the end of their tether – 37 03 19 & a
New peril in the fens – River Lark, Hiam inspects – 37 03 20 & a

1937 03 23

The present flood conditions in the fens were raised in the House of Commons. A titanic struggle was going on between man and relentless nature. Children had been unable to go to school for months, housewives were marooned and unable to provide themselves with the necessities of life, crops had been destroyed bringing ruin to farmers and unemployment to farm workers. Half a million acres of the richest soil in the country were in daily peril during the winter. Much of the flooding had been caused to Government cuts in grants for land drainage, Arthur Greenwood declared 37 03 23

1937 03 24

Army return to fens, cracks in Ouse at Redmere – 37 03 24b

1937 03 27

The Ouse Catchment Board received a telegram from the King and a letter from the Minister of Agriculture saying they had watched with admiration the heroic efforts made to control the fen floods. Sadly a breach had occurred which led to the flooding of Soham fen. Last year Padnal had asked for a new engine but it had been turned down. As a result the old engine had broken and fens were under water. Unless something was done the South Level was heading for the greatest calamity it had ever known. 37 03 27a & b

1937 05 28

A.P. Herbert's Marriage Bill on divorce backed by University MP – 37 05 28

1937 06 10

Nine men who worked on the fen banks at Soham Lode during the recent floods appeared in court charged with stealing a shovel each, the property of the Great Ouse Catchment Board. Several of the men said they had lost their own shovels and took another as 'compensation'. One said he had picked one up and taken it home, burying it in a sack in his back garden after he'd been told he would not get any money for his work. The Board had bought extra shovels which had been handed out before being branded; about 40 had gone missing along with 30 lanterns. 37 06 10a

1937 07 14

During recent floods the water in the Hundred Foot Washes had been held up causing great hardship to occupiers. Yet their drainage charges have greatly increased. The water is let into

the Wash area through the Seven Holes Sluice at Earith. But Welmore Lake Sluice which had only been built about five years is unable to cope. The Hundred Foot should be dredged: at Littleport it was only 30 feet wide. Alternatively the water should be let through the Hermitage Sluice into the Old West River and then out at Denver Sluice. But the washes were there for the express purpose of taking flood waters and grazing land was hired under those conditions. The problem is that rivers in the uplands have been cleared meaning water arrives in about a day, whereas it used to take a week. 37 07 14 & a

1937 07 29

Work on the improvement of the Wash estuary would be very expensive and not only benefit drainage. It could not be undertaken with funding from the Government, but they had no powers to take over the Wash without legislation and that would have no hope of passing. The Ouse Catchment Board were unhappy to have such a liability imposed that not one of them would have thought of accepting. The scheme was an experiment so far as the drainage of the fens was concerned and it would be impossible for internal drainage boards to raise the money. A start should be made on improving the outfall and a large scale scheme for the reclamation of the Wash kept in reserve 37 07 29a & b

1937 09 29a

A scheme of 1853 provided Ely with a supply of water from the River Ouse which was stored in an underground reservoir then pumped to the water tower. The old reservoir was abandoned in 1885 and in 1933 was converted into an open-air swimming pool. Then steam-driven wells were sunk at Isleham to take water from the chalk. Now they plan a new underground reservoir tank which, with the present water tower, will ensure four day's supply in the event of emergency. But proposals for another water tower will not be proceeded with on account of its vulnerability to attacks by aircraft, councillors heard. 37 09 29a

1937 10 01

The Great Ouse Catchment Board considered anti-flood schemes costing over £300,000. Work was in progress on the Old West bank between Aldreth Causeway and Willingham flat bridge, and on Soham, Swaffham & Lakenheath Lodes where weaknesses were found during the spring floods. Draglines have been hired from several contractors as have several miles of railway track and over a hundred tipping wagons. At Manea they have opened up another clay pit and started re-facing the bank but have had to cross over several watercourses and make several substantial bridges. 37 10 01a & b

1937 10 08

Ely RDC heard that Mr Setchell of Haddenham had given land at West End on condition it was used as the site of four one-bedroom bungalows, but they preferred four houses. Mr Thompson's offer of a building site for four houses near the school at Little Ouse would be accepted provided he made a gift of land fronting White House Drove. At Plantation Farm, Shippea Hill a proposal for four pairs of three-bedroomed houses will be submitted to Sir Frederick Hiam for his approval. But Mr Everitt felt that by erecting houses on sites that had been offered free they were subsidising the large landowners with free labour. 37 10 08 & a

1937 12 08

Over 20 fen men appeared in court for nonpayment of Swaffham and Bottisham Drainage Board rates. One said it was nearly impossible for him to pay. "For two years we have been absolutely flooded out. We have a little corn remaining but cannot get a threshing machine down there because of the conditions left after the flood. We are next door to bankruptcy". Another said the farm he occupied had been under four feet of water for three months. The Great Ouse Catchment Board had taken over the district and a new pump had been ordered 37 12 08a

1937 12 15

Sutton Gault Bridges to be transferred from Ouse Catchment Board to Isle of Ely County Council – when 37 12 15

1938 01 14

Ely water tower on Cambridge Road, was built in 1853 and took water from the River Ouse until 1884-5 when by a deep well was sunk at Isleham. It was designed for a population of only 6,000 – 2,500 fewer than now – and needed to be constantly topped up. In case of war, when supplies of electricity or crude oil might be suspended, the tank would be totally inadequate to meet demand from the sugar factory, brewery and laundry. This would leave no water for fire-fighting purposes. They needed a larger reservoir in a field adjoining the present tower, an Inquiry heard 38 01 14 & a

1938 01 28

The Great Ouse Catchment Board wanted to complete work on the Marsh Cut, extend the training walls into the Wash and improve the river between Denver and St Germans. Great work in the past has drained the fens, now they needed to keep the tidal waters out. But they would not proceed without further Government help. The fens had become a very valuable national asset and if a national emergency arose they would be of incalculable value. The Hundred Foot Washes had been flooded time after time for the benefit of other areas and that was absolutely ruining it. Half the wash was derelict but although owners could not let their land, they were called on to pay heavy drainage rates. 38 01 28b

1938 02 10

Gt Ouse Catchment Board accept tender for work on Marsh Cut between West Bank Beacon & Fisher Fleet – 38 02 10a

1938 02 28

Sir Frederick Hiam, a former High Sheriff, died at his residence, Grange Road. He was best-known as an agriculturalist, acquiring many farmers in the Eastern Counties after 1910. He was Director of Vegetable Supplies in the Ministry of Food 1918-21 and toured the Colonies, being knighted for his services. He took a great interest in skating, winning the 220 yards word championship in 1895 in record time and was president of Cambridge Town Football Club. He was a member of the Ouse Drainage Board and chairman of three Drainage Commissioners. His funeral will take place at Ely, where Lady Hiam was laid to rest three weeks ago. 38 02 28

1939 01 13

Floods.—Ouse Catchment Board men have (in view of the existing floods) reinforced the bank running alongside the road on the Cambridgeshire of the bridge over the Old West River (at Stretham). When a Pressman visited the district, he saw flood water lapping menacingly against the sandbags. The Old West River, which runs from Earith to just below Ely, is at this point narrow but now it has risen above its low banks, and is covering the washes which extend from the normal water's edge to higher banks running parallel. Willow trees alongside the normal river, which in summer time afford adequate protection from the sun to the many anglers who sit along the banks, are now half under water. Four large barges are tethered to these trees. They were brought up from Ely loaded with gault to mend the banks in the vicinity. With the continuance of fine weather, the flood water should soon be drained off. A little more snow or rain, however, would bring it over the main Ely to Cambridge Road, and many adjoining fields would be flooded. The Ouse at Holywell is over its banks, and water is within six feet of the Ferry public house. But it has to rise several more inches before it reaches the level of the house. . . . The flood position at Welney yesterday showed little improvement, for there is still 3ft. 6in of water over the road across the wash between Welney and the Suspension Bridge at Oxlode. The flood waters from the Old Bedford River have

risen slightly at Earith but there is at present no anxiety. Flooding is most severe at Brandon Creek and in the Hilgay area CIPof

1939 01 27

The Ouse Catchment Board agreed a scheme for Roswell Pits showing the proposed lay-out of the buildings, dock, roadways etc at a cost of nearly £5,000. Any old iron that may be on hand at the depot should be sold off. At present the yard is used mainly on the South Level Scheme but the time had come when it should be used for the general work of the Board. 39 01 27b

1939 02 02

Throughout the night 300 men patrolled between 3-400 miles of the banks of the Ouse, Cam and Lark. The patrols, equipped with field telephones, are part of the extensive flood prevention scheme organised following the floods of two years ago. News of the gradual decrease in the water level has brought relief to scores of families who had abandoned their houses. A number have returned by boat to Barway and Soham and set about restoring order out of the chaos created by the water. 39 02 02b

1939 02 08

Flood waters from the Ouse at Littleport have caused residents of a number of houses in the Station Road area to either evacuate their homes or live upstairs. It is not the first time this has happened and despite protests nothing has been done. Now ratepayers are demanding action. The council are proposing to build a concrete wall, three feet high. But residents from the Holmes believe this would tend to flood their properties even more. Sewage matter from the homes was emptied on the gardens and it would be easy for bacteria to get into the flood waters 39 02 08a

1939 03 31

Lands in the South Level are in greater peril of inundation than ever before owing to the rapidity of flood waters flowing down from the upland due to improvement of the upland water courses and because Denver Sluice in time of flood is impeded by water passing through the Hundred Foot River. The report by Sir Alexander Gibb should be examined, the Ouse Catchment Board was told. But the Board's engineer had criticised it. "This is the most inefficient body I have ever sat on, far worse than the most incompetent parish council", one member complained. 39 03 31 & a

1939 05 12

Sir Murdoch MacDonald was appointed consulting engineer to the Great Ouse Catchment Board to report on the whole programme of the tidal river and whether a barrage is the right solution to the problem. He had worked chiefly in Egypt, built a bridge across an estuary in Scotland and was now working on a large harbour scheme on the West coast of England. He also had considerable experience in carrying out work on the Wash 39 05 12

1939 05 15

Sir – my criticism of the appointment of Sir Malcolm MacDonald as consulting engineer with the Ouse Drainage Board is that he is 72 years of age. This is rather old for such a tremendous undertaking since the Ouse is probably the most difficult river problem in the world. He is also a Member of Parliament and may not have time to give to the work. And the fee seems a lot. Mr O. Borer, the Board's skilled, resident engineer, is hampered by having so many Saturday afternoon members of the Board who adopt a parish pump attitude. – S.S. Wilson 39 05 15

1939 10 31

The Pike & Eel Inn, a 16th-century property on the banks of the Gt Ouse at Overcote Ferry Needingworth, has been modernised and enlarged with a new part in complete harmony with

the old. The installation of central heating, running water and other modern conveniences has been unobtrusively carried out and the interior, with its period furniture, armour and arms has remained unchanged for centuries. Legend says that Oliver Cromwell held council of war there. It stands in 11 acres of gardens with garages for six cars and has good fishing. Wild fowl and rough shooting is available together with golf, bathing, boating, tennis and hunting.
39 10 31

1939 12 01

Ouse Catchment Board agreed that a pumping plant be installed where the Soham Lode enters the main river. As this was not possible before winter portable pumps should be readied in case an emergency arose 39 12 01a & b

1940 03 29

Ouse Catchment Board's huge projects; if pumping station at Upware would need raise banks Reach, Burwell & Wicken lodes – 40 03 29a

1940 11 08

New Chairman.—After a double ballot, owing to the absence of a clear majority on the first count, Mr. W. C. Jackson was appointed Chairman of the Great Ouse Catchment Board on Friday in the place of Mr. M. G. Townley. The appointment, which is for three years, carries with it a Salary of £500 a year. Voting was conducted by ballot, and on the first count Mr. Jackson received 14 votes for the chairmanship, Mr. W L. Raynes 12 and Mr. M. G. Townley two. On a further vote between the first two candidates only, Mr. Jackson was declared elected by 16 votes to 13.

1940 11 30

Ouse River Board, W.E. Doran appointed engineer – 40 11 30a

1941 03 19

Ouse cut-off channel; Murdoch Macdonald flood scheme will adversely affect Cambridge – 41 03 19a

1941 12 04

Great Ouse Catchment Board report and accounts publication prohibited because enemy might obtain information for operations against the country – 41 12 04

1942 06 29

Cottenham Methodist Rally, Swaffham Fen; although the chain boat at Upware was shaky and taking water badly the Ouse was crossed by many but others decided to try out the new concrete roads – 42 06 29b

1947 07 03

Murdoch Macdonald Ouse flood scheme explained – 42 07 03a

1947 03 10

A night with one degree of frost, followed by the warmest day of the year, and then a night with no frost at all. This was Cambridge's weekend experience. This morning at half-past ten it was 35 and still rising. Work on snow clearance proceeded throughout the weekend in both borough and county with the result that all main roads are now open both ways and all by-roads passable. "We are hoping for the best" said Mr W.E. Doran, engineer to the Ouse Catchment Board this morning. He was asked about the prospect of flooding and explained that at present there is only a slight increase in river discharges. But a quick thaw will no doubt cause floods in the upper reaches. There is no immediate danger of a crisis in the fens because there is a very large storage area available. "If the thaw continues slowly there is a very good chance of it passing off without undue trouble"

1947 03 18 c

Hundreds of men and women, troops and German prisoners among them who worked throughout last night are still pitting their efforts against the biggest flood threat of all time. The breach at Over today widened to over 20 yards during the night and at about 1 o'clock this afternoon water began to pour over the top of the Old West River bank at Haddenham. The break at Lt Thetford yesterday afternoon flooded over 2,000 acres.

1947 03 19 c

The bank has burst at Ten Mile Bank and on the River Wissey and water is pouring through a thirty yard breach. A huge area of fenland is involved and livestock is being evacuated. Another breach has occurred in the bank of the Old West at Stretham and water is pouring in a torrent into Waterbeach fen. The waters of the Cam have dropped seven inches at Clayhithe but a break in the bank is feared about a mile and a half beyond towards Ely

1947 03 24

"Operation Neptune", the scheme to seal the great gap in the banks of the River Ouse near Over by using Neptune amphibians began this afternoon. Nine Neptunes - weighing anything between 37 and 40 tons each - are being employed, as well as submarine nets and sandbags. One has its nose against the bank several yards from the breach and a number of others are in a field about half a mile away on the other side of the river. They will be brought to the gap, line up across the breach and netting will be dropped from them. Tarpaulins will be fastened over the netting and weighted down with sandbags

1947 03 25

Under the glare of "artificial moonlight" "Operation Neptune" was successfully put into effect last night. Nine great amphibian tanks have sealed the breach in the River Ouse at Over. It was the first of its kind ever to be performed in England. The whole area was reminiscent of wartime, crowded with duffle-coated mud-caked troops many of them tired out but still cheerful enough to sing, and military equipment of every description. The operation was due to start at 5 o'clock but owing to technical hitches it was late evening before everything was ready to commence

1947 03 26

Ready at a moments notice to help clear floods in the fens, 50 National Fire Service pumps are standing by in London awaiting the call from Cambridge. Up to midnight on Saturday last 600 pumps had been engaged for more than 3,000 pumping hours and 78 million gallons of water have been moved. Meanwhile fen river levels generally continued to drop today. The flow of flood water from the breach in the Ouse near Earith has been completely halted.

1947 07 02

Mr W.E. Doran, Chief engineer to the River Great Ouse Catchment Board, has announced plans costing £5,000,000 to prevent flooding of the Fens. The plans, which are described as being able quite definitely to give safety to the fens, are a modification of the scheme proposed in 1942 but shelved owing to the war. The 1942 proposal provided for the cutting of a new river from Denver to St Germans, with a balancing reservoir at Denver to accommodate the flow when the tidal door was shut. A new channel 30 miles long is planned from Denver to Barton Mills to cut off flood water from the high ground before it reaches the embanked sections of the fenland rivers. This channel up to the Lark is part of a previous scheme which provided for a cut-off channel going right up to Grantchester.

1947 07 11

The Great Ouse Catchment Board yesterday resolved unanimously that the construction of the relief channel from Denver to St Germans be proceeded with as soon as possible; that the work of preparing the plans for the cut-off channel up to the River Lark be completed at once;

that the work in the rivers above Denver Sluice be modified on the basis of the construction of the cut-off channel and that a fifty years loan be arranged. Another decision was that the Over barrier bank be heightened by three feet at a cost of £40,000.

1947 08 22

Further steps are to be taken by Huntingdon, St Ives, Godmanchester and St Neots, the four towns so badly affected by the March floods, to press home to the Government the urgency of some action being taken to mitigate further floods of these places. Mr W.E. Doran (Ouse Catchment Board Engineer) said that in his view the inhabitants of those towns were suffering from the sins of their ancestors in building houses in a flood area. At the height of the recent flood water was passing St Ives at the rate of 11,000 cubic feet per second. It was impossible to dig a channel capable of taking such an enormous volume of water. A new sluice at the paper mills, St Neots would improve the position for that town but would not stop flooding there

1947 09 04

Secrecy surrounding boring operations now in progress at Coton has given rise to extraordinary rumours in the village. "They are prospecting for uranium deposits" was the general brief amongst several villagers. The operations began last week when two men from London started boring a 20ft hole on the Whitwell bridle path, which is War Department property and used by the Territorial Association as a rifle range. The truth is that the borings are being made on behalf of the Metropolitan Water Board to discover the type of ground through which mains would have to pass if the Board proceeded with a scheme to take a supply from the River Ouse.

1947 11 14

Members of the Great Ouse Catchment Board gave their approval to a revised Flood Protection Scheme estimated to cost £6,550,000. The Consulting Engineers proposed the Cut-off Channel should be taken from Denver to the River Lark with a small extension to pick up the river Kennet. They had also investigated suggestions for a pumping station at Ely and for an extension of the cut-off channel to Upware. The only comment was made by the Chairman who, replying to a query as to whether this scheme when carried out would prevent floods in the future said: "I should think the answer is yes as far as humanly possible"

1947 12 01

The Great Ouse Catchment Board's flood protection scheme is going to take seven to ten years to complete in what is virtually a race against time. Bank height is limited by the fact that the foundations on which the banks are built are not firm. These foundations are in fact, in the words of one engineer "a mixture of compost and toothpaste". The 'toothpaste' is buttery clay which will ribbon through your fingers when you take handfuls and squeeze it. The compost is peat. As the banks can no longer be raised the water level must be kept down. The new scheme will do this and will obviate the necessity of constantly heightening the banks

1948 01 01

In the New Years Honours List published today four names of local interest are noted. Professor Frederick Bartlett, Professor of Experimental Pathology at Cambridge University, Mr J.D. Cockcroft, who was closely associated with atomic research carried on at Cambridge under the late Lord Rutherford and Dr Richard Vyne Smith become Knights Bachelor. Mr W.E. Doran, Chief Engineer of the Great Ouse Catchment Board has been awarded the O.B.E. He was responsible for much of the work carried out during the floods and has also been concerned in the preparation of the Board's new flood protection scheme

1950 09 16

The Great Ouse River Catchment Board reported that reconstruction on the left bank of the River Cam from the "Fish & Duck" to Galloping Corner, over a length of 40 chains has been commenced, This reconstruction had been necessitated by the continued recurrence of slips aggravated by the 1947 floods.

1951 01 12

Major Marshall Nixon, deputy engineer to Mr W.E. Doran at the Great Ouse Catchment Board, was the man who, in the 1947 floods, suggested sealing the Over breach with military amphibious load-carriers. His suggestion proved highly success and earned him the Institute of Civil Engineers' 25-guinea ingenuity prize for 1948. He was made works engineer during the big rehabilitation and damage repair works following the floods.

1951 04 09 c

The Automobile Association reports several cases of flooded roads in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. The worst are at St Neots papermills but water which was ten inches deep on the main road at Caxton was down to four inches this morning. Highest of all rivers is the Cam with extensive flooding on Coe Fen and in the stream near the river on the Backs. There are patrols on the banks of the Cam and the Old West and at Ely the river is four foot six inches above normal

1952 04 24

The County council and landowners in Landbeach, Cottenham and Willingham have objected to their land being included in an internal drainage district of the Great Ouse River Board. . Cottenham was well served by ditches, drains and gravity drainage, but they were not kept in a proper state. The only way was to put them under a drainage district. But the County claimed that the additional cost of the drainage rate on their smallholdings would increase the rate throughout the whole county.

1953 02 06 c

Contrary to reports that floods threaten on an even larger scale at King's Lynn, Mr W.E. Doran of the Great Ouse River Board said the situation was satisfactory. Of the eight breaks which occurred in the banks of the Ouse five were closed before the next high tide. On the remaining breach north of Magdalene railway bridge some 400 men, including airmen, farm workers and University students were employed in filling bags in preparation for the first stage in the closing of the breach.

1953 02 13

High water levels on the River Cam have now dropped considerably at all points except at Bottisham Locks and all precautions for dealing with any emergency during the period of the Spring tides have been completed. A tide warning system will be put into operation; the number of patrols will be increased and emergency gangs, transport and materials made available at short notice. Coastal weather and tidal conditions are received by teleprinter at the Great Ouse River Board's Ely headquarters and police are ready to issue any necessary warnings

1953 09 10

The drainage rate to be levied on the Allottees of the Cottenham Inclosure Award has been reduced by ninepence now that the Old West Internal Drainage District Scheme has been approved. It provides for the abolition of the Cottenham, Rampton and Willingham Drainage District but there is no provision for the disposal of surplus moneys and is unlikely to commence before 1st April 1954.

1954 01 15

Cambridge Waterworks is to supply the Ramsey and St Ives Joint Water Board with a quarter of a million gallons of water a day until 1965. The Board was created in 1937 but its initial plans for abstracting water from the River Ouse had to be abandoned because of 'gross

'pollution' from untreated sewage. They have bored four wells at Earith but other sites did not produce results so the only alternative was to buy water in bulk, although this means laying 12 miles of mains.

1954 01 15

The Great Ouse River Board hopes to borrow £750,000 for the first part of the flood protection scheme. This includes purchase of land for the construction of a tail sluice at King's Lynn and sites for bridges over the relief channel. Ten inhabited houses are scheduled for demolition. The Pollution Officer says samples of effluent from Ely sewage works were found to be of a highly polluting character and had caused a heavy mortality of fish.

1955 01 15

Complaints of flooding in the Hauxton Mill to Shelford area have been investigated and the River Cam will be dredged to eliminate the risk of summer flooding. No such scheme for improvement has previously ever been undertaken by the Great Ouse Catchment Board. The proposed bypass at Barton Mills would involve a dual-carriageway bridge directly over the lock gate and reduce the length of the lock by 25 feet. But there was no active navigation on this part of the River Lark and a combined bridge and sluice structure could be built.

1955 03 11

A scheme for setting back and improving the banks of the Ely Ouse and Ten Mile River should be finished by 1958 and coincide with the completion of the Relief Channel. Homes accommodating 53 people are scheduled for demolition at Littleport and it is imperative that steps now be taken to provide new housing for them. If farm buildings are to be demolished early in 1956 farmers should be given notice so they have time to make alternative arrangements. 55 03 11a

1955 05 13

The County Council, who took over liability for the Upware-Swaffham Road in 1949, would be prepared to take over Upware Lock Bridge provided the Great Ouse River Board brought it up to standard. The bridge rests on the walls of the lock which will remain the liability of the Board. It was originally constructed of timber joists and decking but during the war was strengthened by adding two steel joists. Traffic has increased since the war and loads of up to ten tons were regularly taken over the bridge 55 05 13a

1955 07 16

The windmill at Adventurer's Fen, Wicken stands on a very isolated very isolated spot. The whole direction of the drainage was changed when the fen was brought back into cultivation during the war. It could never again work in that position and may have gone the way of its neighbour in Sedge Fen. But thanks to Rex Wailes and Mr Doran of the Great Ouse River Board it is to be repaired and moved to the entrance of Wicken Sedge Fen where it will be seen by visitors. The work has been entrusted to Mr C.J. Ison of Histon who himself moved the post mill at Madingley to its present site. The cost will be borne by Lord Fairhaven. 55 07 16c

1955 12 15

An 18 1/4 lb female pike was landed from the Ouse near Over Staunch. It was taken on live bait by Bert Ball of Sandy and broke his rod as it was being landed. When it was deposited on the bank a large eel popped out of its mouth. It was the largest from this stretch of water for many years, some say the best since a 20-pounder was landed by Mr Cooke in 1910 55 12 15a

1956 02 14

Since 1947 the Great Ouse River Board has spent £950,000 on strengthening and heightening the banks in the south level in their aim to prevent a recurrence of disastrous floods. Part one

of the scheme involved the cutting of a relief channel from Denver to King's Lynn. Part two: the strengthening and heightening of the banks of the Ten Mile River and the deepening of the river will begin this summer and part three, a cut-off channel around the edge of the fens will start a year or two later. But engineers are still not satisfied that if the same conditions reoccurred there would not be a break somewhere 56 02 14c

1956 07 20

Samples of water taken from the River Ouse at Huntingdon after many fish were killed on the Newton stretch of the river contained traces of cyanide. It came from the normal effluent discharge from Huntingdon Council's septic tank at Hartford. No other sources of pollution were found and the only chemical spraying was using a non-toxic weed killer. It was important that the district pollution prevention officer should be on the telephone, but the Post Office did not have the necessary equipment. 56 07 20b

1957 12 11

A relief channel is being cut from King's Lynn to the River Ouse, including five major road bridges and diversion roads and one railway bridge – which are being built on dry land to allow the channel to run beneath them. The channel will be 24 feet deep, 300 feet wide at ground level and 400 feet wide at bank tops, Mechanical crawler drag line navvies are being used with mobile electrical conveyor belts and elevators to remove the vast quantities of earth and at the same time create two banks. 57 12 11

1958 04 11

Residents of New River Bank, Littleport, face 14 months without a means of crossing the river while Sandhill Bridge is replaced. They will not be able to get to their allotments and asked the Great Ouse River Board for a temporary footbridge. But this would be extremely expensive. The alternative would be to have a man and boat on duty. This would not be cheap, costing £750 a year, however one could be provided at pre-determined times each day 58 04 11a

1958 09 19

The Great Ouse River Board's flood protection scheme between Ely and King's Lynn is nearly at the half-way stage. Work started in 1954 and part one, including an 11-mile long flood relief channel from Denver to Lynn controlled by a head sluice is nearing completion. The deepening and widening of the Ten Mile River and Ely Ouse over a length of 19 miles has been going on for a year but the flood diversion channel has not yet been put out to tender. People in the fens will feel a lot safer when it is completed. 58 09 19 & a

1959 01 14

A slippage in the bank of the Ely Ouse at Braham Dock caused and a large team of workmen were sent to deal with the incident. While they were there another slip happened and during the night about 60 workmen were engaged in repairing the banks. Another serious incident was averted by the quick action of the aged engineer at the old 'Pepper Pop' mill on the River Lark, near Isleham. At 2.30 am he was awaked by the sound of rushing water and discovered a culvert had started to overflow. He contacted the River Board who managed to control the damage 59 01 14a

1959 09 11

Rampton flooding – no action by Ouse River Board – 59 09 11f

1959 10 24

In 1954 work began on a Great Ouse Flood Protection Scheme. The construction of an eleven-mile long relief channel parallel to the tidal part of the river was completed with the opening of a tail sluice at King's Lynn by the Duke of Edinburgh. He mentioned the great tidal surge of 1953 when over 1,000 acres of the Sandringham estate were flooded. Now a

great anxiety had been lifted from many minds. The next stages involve deepening 19 miles of river as far as the Cam and the cutting of a new 28-mile long channel around the edge of the fens. 59 10 24 & 24a & b

The Cambridgeshire Collection in Cambridge Central Library has newspaper cuttings on this topic from the 1960s to date

1960 01 11

Two men were killed when a five-ton lorry owned by the Great Ouse River Board was in collision with a two-coach diesel train on a farm-service crossing between Isleham and Worlington. The front of the train was badly smashed and passengers severely shaken. Rescue workers were hampered by icy roads leading to the Lee Farm crossing, which is in a very isolated position. The line is now open under caution as the permanent way is damaged. 60 01 15

1960 01 15

Mr A.G. Wright, Chairman of the Flood Protection Committee of the Great Ouse River Board, has been awarded the OBE for his work in carrying out the huge flood protection scheme following the flooding of 1947. The channel outfall below the Tail Sluice is nearly complete and all work finished on the tidal river banks. Mattresses have been laid at the Wash barrier and contractors are now tendering for the third part of the scheme. "Only those who live in the fens can realise what it is to be flooded and what the effect of a protection scheme means", he said. 60 01 15c

1960 02 19

Three sections of disused railway lines might be used in connection with the construction of future new roads in Huntingdonshire. They are the line and bridge from Bluntisham to Earith on the St Ives-Earith-Ely branch line, the bridge over the Great Ouse between St Ives station and the level crossing on the B1040 and the line and bridges from Huntingdon to Kimbolton. But councillors see no use for the line from Ramsey East station to Warboys. 60 02 19a

1961 01 04

A 67ft long tree trunk recovered from the River Ouse at Adelaide has been revealed as a bog oak about 4,500 years old. It came to light during underwater protective work to the river bridge and was dragged to the bank by two bulldozers. Because of its length, straightness and thickness it was thought to have been one of the trees brought to Ely to construct the Octagon. But it was found in peaty soil and the position in which the oak was discovered did not in the 14th-century form part of the river bed. Now Prof H. Godwin has confirmed the date through radiocarbon-dating 61 01 04a

1961 01 11

For 900 years the Metcalfe family have made a living at Holywell by cutting the rushes growing in the sluggish River Ouse. It had always been considered men's work – until Mrs Dorothy Metcalfe-Arnold took over while her sons were away in the war. She starts in July, taking a flat-bottomed boat to the rush beds and cutting them at their roots with a sharp knife attached to a long pole. As the rushes float to the top she collects them into bundles and brings them back to the village where they are dried. They are transported to all parts of the country and used for different purposes 61 01 11

1962 09 27

About 250 people were ferried across the River Ouse at Ely for an open day staged by Appleyard, Lincoln and Company the boatbuilding company which was formed in 1944 from a business which had its origins in the early 1800's. The new factory has increased facilities for the manufacture of fibre-glass craft for sale and hire, expanding their fleet of ten cabin cruisers operating on the fenland waterways. 62 06 30a 62 09 27

1962 09 27

Huge sluice gates have been constructed as part of the £10 million Great Ouse Flood Protection Scheme designed to save the Fens from abnormal conditions. They will control the peak flood waters of the Little Ouse, Wissey and Lark rivers and allow them to be fed into the new 27-miles long cut-off channel due for completion next year. The new channel starting at Denver and ending at Brandon Mills will also provide miles of new fishing facilities and a new waterway for sailing enthusiasts. 62 09 27a

1963 04 23

Someone misread a map and gave the wrong name to what will be Britain's biggest man-made lake after 1,700 acres of Hunts countryside is flooded by water from the Great Ouse. Seven farms and 20 houses will be inundated by the lake's 13 thousand million gallons which are urgently needed to supply water to neighbouring counties. The Great Ouse Water Authority had decided to call it Diddington Reservoir but after protests from Grafham villages agreed it had been wrongly named. 63 04 23a

1963 04 26

County Sports of St Neots is one of the country's leading manufacturers of cricket bats, exporting them around the world. It was started in 1925 by Mr A.E. Trimmings and his father and uses English willow, some grown on islands in the Ouse, to make the blades. The most skilled craftsmen manufacture the handles which are designed and patented by the firm. But there is a lack of people willing to take the five year apprenticeship and a lack of interest in hand crafts. 63 04 26b

1963 05 18

Temporary bridge being built over Ouse at St Neots – photo – 63 05 18

1964 08 15

Great Ouse flood protection scheme to open in September – 64 08 15

1964 09 19

A chalk inscription claiming the Great Ouse River Board's £10 million flood protection scheme was a 'waste of money' had to be removed from the Lark Head sluice at Barton Mills before it was opened. It marked the end of ten years' work on the three-part scheme which has included a 27-mile relief channel skirting the edge of the fens, the widening of the Ely Ouse and Ten Mile Rivers and the construction of a new 11-mile relief channel from Denver to King's Lynn. It is as great an engineering feat as anything ever attempted in this country. 64 09 19

1966 09 23

Great Ouse River Authority open new HQ at Gt Ouse House, Clarendon Road; will be shortage of water; formed in 1920 to take over work Bedford Level Corporation – 66 09 23a

1970 06 25

Ely-Ouse – Essex scheme – feature – 70 06 25 & 25a

1972 08 14

The first boat to go through Roxton Lock, near St Neots since the beginning of the century, took the Duke of Bedford a mile up-river towards Great Barford after he had opened the new £80,200 lock on Saturday. The opening marked the 21st birthday of the Great Ouse Restoration Society whose pressure has so far opened up three locks between Eaton Socon and Bedford. There are three more to go, Great Barford, Willington and Goldington.

1973 04 03

A rota for extracting water from rivers for crop irrigation and controls on the use of domestic water are among the suggestions put forward by farmers to counteract the water shortage crisis in the Great Ouse River basin. Mr Derek Crawley stressed that farmers argued it seemed unfair that there should be a ban on supplies which were needed for their livelihood when there were no controls on car washing or garden hoses. The river authority pointed out that it is important to keep river flows to a certain level in order that there was the necessary level of dilution to check pollution and ensure the dilution of sewage outlets into the rivers. Already the Ouse at Denver is the lowest since 1934 when records started

1973 08 20

Only three boats took part in a demonstration cruise to draw attention to the Reach and Burwell lodes which were in danger of being closed and drained. But Great Ouse River Authority had already agreed to spend £155,000 in preserving the waterway. The lodes were constructed to drain the fens but the drainage has shrunk the peat soil so that the waterways and their banks stand above the surrounding land. Now the banks are wearing and leaking - flooding the land they were constructed to drain

1975 05 19

Towns and villages were mopping up after a downpour which led to road chaos, flooding and burst river banks. Some of the most serious flooding was in the St Neots, Eynesbury and Eaton Socon areas after the continuous rain swelled tributaries of the Ouse until they burst their banks. It was the second time in less than six months that these areas had been hit by floods.

1975 10 11

Denver Sluice, one of the great monuments of fenland engineering and a vital control point in the flood threats of the past, could soon be something of a white elephant. Its fate hinges on an investigation being carried out into the level of silt build-up in the Great Ouse River basin which the sluice may have limited power to control. The river systems increasing use for fresh water supplies through Grafham Water, the Ely-Essex water transfer project and proposals to regulate groundwater levels in the chalkland had reduced river flows and opened the possibility of silt coming in from the Wash.

1976 04 30

The eleven-month long drought brought two strong warnings today. Water supplies to all homes in the Huntingdon and St Neots area will be cut off within three months unless people economise. Elsewhere the dry weather is threatening all rivers with sewage pollution. Downstream from the over-loaded Cambridge sewage works the Great Ouse River Authority say the threat of wholesale sewage pollution was now "crucial".

1976 08 20

The scheme to reverse the flow of the River Ouse from Ely to Huntingdon is likely to upset boat owners and people living near the river; there could be noise from pumps at locks, and smell in the tidal part of the river. The scheme, a bid to offset the impact of the drought crisis, will mean closing seven locks to navigation between Earith and Offord. If it goes according to plan about 30 million gallons of water a day will be pumped into Grafham Water.

1976 09 14

Although river flows have started to recover as a result of the weekend rainfall the Anglian Water Authority is sticking to its stand-by programme of controls in the Huntingdon and St Neots areas. But for the first time for many months it has been possible to pump water from the River Ouse into Grafham reservoir, which is an important source of water for the area. Director of Operations, Mr Geoffrey Bowyer said: "We need another six inches of rain fairly shortly to bring us back to anything like normal". The drought minister, Mr Denis Howell is to visit the area to inspect a focal point of the £200,000 reversal scheme at Earith.

1976 09 30

Plans to ease the water shortage in the Huntingdon area are being held up because there is too much water in the River Ouse to bring the unique £200,000 flow-reversal scheme into operation. Graham Water is already being recharged much faster than it is being emptied. Up to a few weeks ago the flow was so low that the reservoir pumps had been idle for weeks. Now they are putting in up to 50 million gallons a day as a result of the heavy rainfall which has swollen the Ouse River system. As the Graham pumps can only handle up to 100 million gallons a day there is no safety margin to allow the trial pumping to begin

1976 10 30

The long dry summer and drought emergency measures do not appear to have influenced experts studying the possibility of storing fresh water in the Wash. Their main conclusions are the storage reservoirs are unlikely to be required this century. A more immediate improvement could be to abstract residual flows from the rivers Great Ouse and Nene which could provide additional supplies of up to 75 million gallons per day, at a relatively low cost. Since 1970 predictions of population growth and future demands for water have dropped significantly

1978 02 16

After 17 years work costing nearly £1 million the 18 miles of River Ouse between Bedford and St Neots has been fully restored for boating. The Goldington project, which involves rebuilding the decayed lock along with dredging the river, has been the most expensive part of the operation. Previously a determined boater who was prepared to be his own lock-keeper and do some heaving and pulling might have made it through to Bedford with luck. Now it should be a straightforward journey

1978 03 01

A unique village 'industry' may have dried up at Earith, and villagers are delighted. Winter flooding on the main road to Cambridge meant that people with tractors could sometimes make money by towing out stranded motorists whose cars stalled in the water. But now the County council has spent £23,000 on raising the level of the road by more than ten inches, and hope that this will keep at bay the waters of the River Ouse. Previously flooding had meant the road was blocked to cars for sometimes 15 days a year.

1978 08 08

Considering the amount of rain that has fallen during the past few months, the impossible has happened – Anglian Water Authority 'lost' part of the River Ouse near St Ives. About a mile of the water between sluice gates at Hemingford and Houghton simply drained away and left boats high and dry. There are two sets of sluice gates which open and close automatically to control the river flow and they were both open to cope with the increased flow caused by the rain. But a large tree became stuck under one of the gates, preventing it from closing so the water flowed away until there was nothing but a trickle on the river bed.

1978 09 06

The first new boat sailed into the new marina beside the River Ouse at Ely. Work on Banham Marina, which can hold 112 pleasure craft, started in May and for the past few days it has been gradually filled with water. It is now ready for use, although landscaping, paths and car parks still have to be completed. It was designed by Dennis Adams and Partners of Ely and finished just in time for boat owners to 'lay off' their craft for the winter months.

1978 10 09

The long-running dispute over responsibility for repairing the only bridge over the Old West River which gives access for thousands of visitors each year to the Stretham pumping station has been settled. The County Council and a local farming company have agreed to pay £1,000 each towards the cost of repairs. The dispute began two years ago when the county closed the

bridge because some of the structure had collapsed and part of the roadway had fallen into the river. Now it will be rebuilt and a bus turning area constructed for visitors to the engine which is preserved as a museum attracting industrial archaeologists.

1978 12 14

Work has started on a £2.2 million by-pass for St Ives which will relieve one of the major bottlenecks in the county – the 15th century bridge which spans the River Ouse. A new 25-span viaduct will carry the road across the river and adjoining flood plain and should be open by October 1980. Then the present bridge, which now carried about 10,000 vehicles a day, will be restricted to pedestrians, cyclists and service vehicles only.

1979 07 16

The fate of the ancient waterways known as lodes in the Burwell area are hanging in the balance. Conservationists argue they are sanctuaries for wild life and a quiet beauty spot in the flat, arable landscape. They are important for anglers, boaters and ramblers. But water seeps through the banks and there is a danger of them collapsing completely, causing severe flooding. There was an outcry when Great Ouse River Division proposed to bulldoze them to make way for a ground drainage system. Now the Ministry of Agriculture may pay towards drainage if local councils can also fund it. But they say they have no money.

1980 09 04

Anglers have declared war on the zander, a killer fish which they claim has destroyed their sport in the last 10 years. The problem started in 1963 when the Great Ouse River Board introduced them from Eastern Europe to try and broaden the variety in local waterways. But since then the zander with its voracious appetite and vicious killer instincts has practically taken over. 80 09 04a

1980 10 07

One of the most dramatically effective road works, the St Ives bypass which provides the first new crossing of the Great Ouse since the 15th-century, sweeps round the town partially using the track of the old St Ives to March railway line. It will carry virtually all the vehicles presently queuing to cross the medieval stone bridge which has been the worst bottleneck in the Cambridgeshire road system. Now it will be closed and the average flow of 11,000 vehicles a day will dwindle to around 500. 80 10 07a

1981 01 14

Fox Island is a nature reserve on the river Kym just before it joins the Great Ouse by St Neots Golf Club. It was originally a two-acre strip of sedge and nettles, the site of a tennis court attached to a bungalow built by an actor from London. It was bought by Dr Patterson who cut through the site to form an island. He then set about turning it into a sanctuary and it is now managed as a reserve 81 01 14b

1981 01 31

The Viscountess Bury plopped into the Ouse with a new nose, a new right arm and a dud battery. The 93-year-old doyenne of pleasure boats was relaunched at Ely after a refit that included restoration of its figurehead, a well-upholstered Victorian lady. But she would not start and it took over an hour to get her under way. It should be available for hire by the end of April. 81 01 31

1981 03 13

Services on the Cambridge to St Ives railway line stopped in October 1970 and researchers want to assess the effects of the closure. But they had difficulty tracking down former users, because of the mobility of the Ouse valley towns. The line closed because the populations they served were small and used trains infrequently; in winter they carried only 10 to 20

passengers, most for non-food shopping or visiting families. Most switched to buses which took between 35-79 minutes for the journey, compared to 27 minutes by train. 81 03 13

1981 04 28

There were problems in many parts of the Bedford Ouse catchment area after 45 millimetres of rain and six inches of snow prompted the issuing of a red flood warning. But now they have interrogable machines fitted to rivers which link into the telephone lines. When dialled they give a series of codes which convey the level of river discharge and allow engineers to open sluices and lock gates. They can't stop flooding, just ensure that people are warned so they may take preventative action. 81 04 28a

1981 05 08

The Viscountess Bury, one of the oldest pleasure boats in the world, has made a come-back after a £10,000 restoration. The 93-year-old boat began the new season with a 16-mile round cruise along the Ouse north from Ely. She originally ran on electricity but is now diesel-powered and ready to ply the rivers, 24-hours a day, for many years to come. 81 05 08

1981 10 09

Excavation work on a new marina at Annesdale, Ely is unearthing remains of The Nancy, a steam-driven cargo barge which plied the River Ouse until she was laid up in 1914. It was then towed near the railway bridge to be cut up for scrap but the work proved too expensive and it was left to rot until the 1940's when the Ouse was widened. It was then in the way so Ted Appleyard dug a hole on the Babylon site, dragged it out of the water and dumped her in it. 81 10 09c

1982 07 09

Farmers who pressed for a drainage board to be set up in the Swavesey area have fallen out over the level of rates they should pay for the work. An elaborate drainage scheme was approved which it was claimed would reduce flooding from twice a year to once every decade and pay for itself with increased yields. But farmers on higher land did not want to pay as much as those lower down and the failure to levy rates means the work has been taken over by the Great Ouse River Board. 82 07 09

1983 05 12

Huntingdon Hosiery Mill which has stood empty for three years since its £150,000 renovation may be turned into flats. The mill, which was built in the 1850s on the banks of the Ouse has been bought by a Cottenham developer. Some 80 units are being planned ranging from studio flats to two-bedroomed apartments with prices from £15-£30,000 83 05 12 p9

1984 03 22

Churches, as the centre of worship and comfort in times of need were once held in high esteem. Today as religion increasingly takes a back seat their fate hangs in the balance. In Cambridgeshire alone there are 21 redundant churches. St Mary's in Benwick and St Mary Magdalene in March have been demolished while churches in Little Raveley, Little Ouse and Barway have been sold as homes and St Margaret's in Wyton is used as a games and recreation room 84 03 22 p19

1984 10 26

The Fish and Duck pub and marina at Little Thetford failed to reach its reserve price of £150,000 when put up for auction. The complex on a 23 acre site at the confluence of the Great Ouse and Cam was put up for sale by its present owner, Nowinvest Ltd but the top bid fell a little short of what was required 84 10 26

1985 08 07

A Nene-Ouse navigation link from Stanground to Salter's Lode would allow through passage from Bedford, Cambridge and Ely to the major waterway network of the country, via the Grand Union Canal. At present about 650 craft annually use locks at either end of the proposed link, a figure that could treble. The Middle Level would be improved encouraging craft to stop at March and Whittlesey, boosting tourism and leading to additional industries such as craft workshops and camping sites. 85 08 07

1986 04 04

Ernie James is a real fen tiger and a marvellous storyteller. His remarkable memory is capable of making any fireside chat an enthralling yarn. Now he has set down his "Memoirs of a Fen Tiger". The book describes his varied life as ferryman, mole catcher, wildfowler, eel catcher and ice skater in the tiny village of Welney where he lives with his wife in a little white-washed cottage overlooking the Ouse washes. He's in demand by film makers and people who want to know about country crafts 86 04 04b

86 06 16

At the Ouse Valley Bait Company near Longstowe the cheerful staff seem hardly to notice the stench of rotting meat and the pungent ammonia produced by the 1,500 gallons of maggots produced each week for sale to angling shops. This requires the laying of huge numbers of eggs in the fly room, maintained at a steady 65 degrees F. Every time the door opens several dozen bluebottles make a flight for freedom. "I've only swallowed two in 16 years", the owner joked calmly, almost making it three as he spoke. 86 06 16a

1986 06 26

The Royal Oak just off the A10 at Stretham ferry is on the market for £200,000. It is a freehouse with a bar, five bedrooms and nine acres of land including a frontage on the Great Ouse with moorings, a holiday caravan park and a shop. Now it may be extended and upgraded by Unicorn Inns of Royston, taking it up-market and offering a wide range of traditional beers. 86 06 26b

1988 06 17

Coulson and Sons have reconstructed an historic bridge in the grounds of a Godmanchester mansion using impressions left in concrete during old restoration work. The 'Chinese Chippendale' bridge at Island Hall collapsed in the 1970s, more than 200 years after it was built. One of the original timbers was found perfectly preserved in the river mud and this was also used in designing the new one which is made of English oak. It connects the garden of Island Hall to an island in the Ouse. The house has been in the Vane Percy family since 1904 but was taken over by the RAF in 1943 and later used by the council. It came back into the family in 1983 88 06 17

1989 08 23

The Fish and Duck pub at Pope's Corner on the junction of the Great Ouse and Cam reopened at Easter. The pub used to be the ideal place for boats to moor for an overnight stop and the new Nelson Marina will preserve the tranquillity and help develop the pub and restaurant which serves sausage and onion pies and other tempting dishes. One of the function rooms will soon accommodate up to 150 people making it an increasingly busy place 89 08 23b

1990 07 09

Engineering project to protect fens starts; banks along Ouse washes from Earith to Denver will be heightened and strengthened; peat land has fallen five metres since barrier banks were built; a South Level bank burst could cause £23 million damage, Middle Level burst up to £34m. – 90 07 09a

The Cambridgeshire Collection in Lion Yard Library has newspaper cuttings files on this topic from the 1960s to date